

To Love And Be Loved - Buddhism's Theme for The New Millennium

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To us as Buddhists of the world, this is a very special occasion. Let us begin by thanking the entire membership of the UN who helped to declare the full moon day of the month of May as a holiday for the United Nations, i.e. to the whole world. We Buddhists have an unbeaten record of more than twenty-five centuries of having served diverse sorts of people in the world in their weal and woe, be it in the east or in the west. The world over, Buddhism has been a source of comfort to mankind.

Today we are extremely appreciative of the fact that the United Nations have thought it fit to recognize this and declare the full moon day of the month of May on which the birth and the enlightenment of Gotama the Buddha took place as a holiday for the United Nations. The world of sense and sanity would indeed applaud the UN for this, with a very deep sense of gratitude. This declaration in itself would go down in history as a major event of the new millennium.

As the teacher of one of the major religions of the world today, Gotama the Buddha of India or Shakyamuni, as he is more popularly known currently, stands eminently unique. He achieved this historical position which he has legitimately come to hold for the last twenty-five centuries, mainly on account of the unbounded love which he proclaimed towards all life, not only human, that exists in the universe. This magnanimity and this philanthropy of the Buddha is beautifully enshrined in the words of the Metta Sutta [Suttanipāta vv. 43-52] where the theme runs as '**May all beings be safe and secure. May the whole world of living things enjoy comfort and happiness**': *sukhino vā khemino hontu sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā*.

The Buddha does not accept the idea of a creation of the world. Nor does he

claim to have within it any chosen people whom he is inclined to favour and reward, as it pleases him. There shall be no regional, ethnic or any other preferences whatsoever in terms of which neither the creator shall show partialities nor the created have any special privileges to pray for extra paternal care. In the world of Buddhism, there shall be no *persona grata* and no discrimination between believers and non-believers.

In Buddhism, the invitation is thrown open to everyone to come and investigate the message of the Buddha, prior to acceptance, and the text of the invitation reads as ' **Come and behold** ' or *Ehi passiko*. The only pre-requisite for admission is the capacity and the willingness to listen: *Ye sotavanto pamuñcantu saddham*. Judged by world standards of today, any philosophy or religious creed which possesses such qualities would be deemed generous and magnanimous and free from dogmatism and sectarianism.

Buddhism of more than twenty-five centuries ago undoubtedly possessed all these virtues. It led the way as to what world religions should be. This is what facilitated Buddhism, within the few centuries of its early history, even before the advent of Christianity, to reach many areas of western Asia like Afghanistan and Iran, reaching almost up to the Caspian Sea. By 50 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Ming Ti, it had already reached China. It is worth refreshing our memory here on what a Muslim historian like al-Biruni [Abu'l-Rayban Mohammad al-Birūni] wrote on this subject more than a thousand years ago.

" Abu'l-Rayban Mohammad al-Birūni was the first to trace the history of Buddhism in Central Asia and the Near East. Approximately a thousand years ago, he said: In former times Khorāsān, Persia, Iraq, Mosul, the country up to the frontier of Syria, was Buddhistic. But then Zarathustra went forth from Adharbāyjān and preached Magism in Balkh (Baktra). ... In consequence, the Buddhists were banished from those countries, and had to emigrate to the countries east of Balkh."

Buddha Gotama, in one of the lovely sermons recorded in Buddhist history, admonishes his young son Rahula of eighteen years of age at the time, whom he had already ordained as a monk, about the benefits of magnanimous development of love [Mahārāhulovāda Sutta M. I.424 f.]. What is amazing here is the vast range through which the Buddha takes us as he visualizes for us what love can be. Incidentally it covers the entire range of what is elsewhere referred to as divine modes of living or *brahma-vihāra*.

Love which is equated here to **one's wholesome relationships with the entire world around** is phased out through four stages of gradual development of human attitudes [*sarikkappa*]. 1. The first is *mettā* which is equivalent to **acceptance of universal friendship with all sentient beings**, in order to eliminate feelings of enmity and conflict [*vyāpāda*]. 2. The next is *karuṇā* or compassion. It is the feeling of sympathy and concern for those in distress and pain. It eliminates the desire to hurt and cause pain to others [*vihesā*]. 3. The third in the list is *muditā* or appreciative joy or the ability to rejoice in the success of others. This is recommended as an antidote against apathy and indifference [referred to as *arati* or lack of delight in], and is to be used to combat against an unproductive and stagnant state of mind. Finally in the list of *brahma-vihāra* we have 4. what is called *upekkhā*, generally translated into English as equanimity. This is a very high state of mental development where likes and dislikes are held equal in the scales, without any leanings in either direction. It is said to eradicate feelings of ingrained and deep-seated hostilities or *paṭigha*. It is obviously a perfected state of non-partisan neutrality, born of wisdom and judgement.

The common sense view on which this brief for universal love is presented is the one which admits that all living things, both big and small, love their lives, i.e. love to live and do not wish to have their lives terminated [*jīvitukāmā amaritukāmā*]. It should be the living beings who should have a right over their lives. Taking that as the norm, let no one kill nor cause others to kill, for whatever reason. The Buddha told this to King Pasenadi of Kosala in the following: Life is

dear to everyone. Therefore let no one who loves his own life [*attakāmo*] cause injury to another. Love is clearly a two way process. One has to love others if one wishes equally to be loved by others.

Evaṃ piyo puthu attā paresaṃ tasmā na himse paraṃ attakāmo. S. I. 75

Respect for life is a recurrent theme in the teachings of the Buddha. The first injunction of the *pañcasīla* which runs as *pānātipātā veramaṇī* requires that one not only desists from killing living things but also positively prevents destruction of life and extends one's love to all living things: *sabba-pāṇa-bhūta-hitānukampī viharatī*. We make bold to say that this is a *dharma* which we shared in India along with the Jains. **Compassion is the ultimate ethic: *Ahimsā paramo dharmah*** was a common theme jointly sponsored both by the Buddhists and the Jains.

This, one does on that ground of universal awareness that every living thing dreads being beaten or being put to death. If one knows this about oneself, one should neither by oneself kill nor cause another to kill. The Dhammapada devotes two verses to this subject in its Daṇḍa Vagga [Ch. X. vv. 129 & 130]. This is the basis of the Buddhist **self-stand** or *attūpanāyika* ethic.

Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa sabbe bhāyanti maccuno

attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā na haneyya na ghātaye. Dh. v. 129

The totality of the concept of respect for life is best embodied in the lines of the Dhammika Sutta [Suttanipāta v.394] where it specifically mentions three aspects which are directly or indirectly involved in the process of destruction of life. They are 1. Either one does the killing or destruction of life oneself [*pāṇaṃ na hane*]. 2. Gets another to do the killing [*na ca ghātayeyya*]. 3. Approves and endorses the killing done by another [*na cānujaññā hanataṃ paresaṃ*]. As an aid to developing a correct and wholesome attitude to life, of respecting and safeguarding it, one is also called upon to acquire positive habits of rejecting and keeping out of one's reach weapons of destruction, weapons that destroy any form of life [*sabbesu bhūtesu nidhāya daṇḍaṃ.* ibid.].

It is very important to note that in the formulation of regulative precepts called *sīla* which are intended to upgrade the quality of human life in society, this particular one relating to respect for life has points of emphasis which are both positive and negative. In the first instance, one resolves not to destroy life and to desist from causing injury to any living thing. This is stated as ***pāṇātipātā veramaṇī***. This is the negative restraining injunction, which all the same, is taken upon oneself by one's own choice. The spirit of this first precept if further reinforced with one's resolve to reject weapons of destruction [***nihita-sattho nihita-daṇḍo***]. The positive aspect of this is stated as 'ful of love and compassion for all living things': ***sabba-pāṇa-bhūta-hitānukampī***.

In the world today, we can utilize this Buddhist attitude of respect for life in our attempt to eliminate war and establish peace at world level. A close scrutiny of world history, particularly an analysis of events of the second half of this century, instils in us a legitimate sense of dread and horror as we move in to the territory of conquest. Throughout history, the sting of conquest has been venomous. In this sense of conquest there are a few other associated English words like overthrow, defeat, vanquish, subjugate etc. It also means to eliminate, to take away the right of existence and to destroy identity. At least the process of conquest is seen to end up with these results.

Closely tied up with this process of thought and action are aggression and destruction. It also moves in the direction of acquisition and appropriation which are invariable results of the conquest motive. The most manifest aspect of this in history has been territorial conquest, expressed under various guises as territorial expansion., political aggrandisement and invasion, the obvious motivation being the need for more land for one group of people as against another, for the exploitation of the valuable resources there of, more people by way of converts to one's political or religious creeds and more agricultural and industrial produce for the sustenance of the conquering people and above all, the resulting economic gains which rank high in today's political vision.

But this mode of crushing another country and its people physically under the

heel of power, whether it be political, religious or military, leaves behind tell-tale gaping wounds which take shorter or longer periods of time to heal. War-torn Europe after the World War II in the west and the epitome of tragedy in Hiroshima in the east are very clear examples. Since then, many other regions of the world have been invaded, subjugated and overrun likewise, leaving behind trails of bloodshed and massacre, economic disaster and socio-cultural denudation, even up to a total geophysical devastation as in the case of the war in Vietnam.

This kind of move to rout swings round the two basic principles of the desire to acquire, own and possess, and the other equally vicious desire to eliminate or exterminate: the instinctive moves of likes and dislikes or attraction and repulsion. Spoken in terms of a religious idiom, as is known to Buddhism, they are greed and hatred. Greed is what over-rides needs, a position which human society, with any degree of sanity, could not concede. To concede it would be to make room for social maladies like imbalances, poverty and haves and have-nots. Hatred or ill-will, by whatever name one calls it, is the inability of man to love and tolerate another. Self-righteousness and egoism or an over-inflated notion of selfhood of **I** and **mine** is the only perch from which one could attempt to defend any move in this direction.

This form of self-expansion and self-extension at the expense of others, whether it be by individuals or by more organized collective groups, merely out of material bread and butter interests, would be reckoned as being at savage level. Primitive man at the rudimentary stages of human development, at the stage of food-gatherers, without an awareness of the possibilities of cultivation and production, had no alternative other than grabbing the stores of those nearby. These are true records of human history, not to be ashamed of when it happened then, so far, far away. Here is a beautiful report of such an incident extracted from an early Buddhist text.

At an early stage in the history of man when food-gatherers, regardless of their daily needs, tended to hoard grain, thus creating inevitable imbalances and

maldistribution, the wiser ones then are said to have thought out a solution in equitably dividing the grain [*sāliṃ vibhajeyyāma*] and fixing a limit on possession and consumption [*mariyādm̐ thapeyyāma*]. Both these statements are incorrectly translated at Dialogues of the Buddha III. p.37.

A more recent translation of the same in Thus Have I Heard by Maurice Walshe [published in 1987, sixty-six years after the former], blunders on the same, making the mistakes even worse. Even this arrangement of food control and regulation was disrupted by a greedy man who, safe-guarding his own allocation, stole another's portion for his consumption [incorrectly translated again]. The others seized him, chastised him and beat him up. [The original Pali text of this occurs in the Agganna Sutta at Digha Nikaya III. p. 92 PTS].

But it is totally shameless and despicable when such things are being done stealthily in the world today, in a world believed to be more civilized than that of our ancestors. Ingeniously thought out theories and explanations may be advanced in justification of these malpractices which are no less than crimes committed by man against man. This manner of plunder and misappropriation continues to be indulged in all the world over, within nations and at international levels. They evade detection, no doubt, and the world is sadder and poorer thereby.

At a time like this when ideological, religious and ethnic crises have arisen in many parts of the world, particularly in areas where philosophical maturity, for whatever reason, is at a low ebb, and humanitarian considerations have virtually evaporated, threatening a process of dehumanization and desertification, there is much meaning in one's returning to one's native genius: to a pattern of thinking and a system of values which have grown out of one's own soil which would certainly be comparable to herbal therapy as against a drug cure, with less side effects and less liable to be toxic.

The late Dr. Raphaelo M.Salas, one time United Nations Expert on population, in a Convocation Address of the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka,

delivered in 1979 referred to the Buddha as a wise old master who lived in India over 2500 years ago and quoting the verse No. 336 of the Dhammapada said that those words of the Buddha should be Sri Lanka's contribution to the world for the 21st century.

"Who so in the world overcomes this base unruly craving, from him sorrows fall away like water drops from a lotus leaf."

Today, more than two decades later, we need to appreciate the wisdom of what he said and realise the necessity to delve deeper into the teachings of that wise old master - the Buddha. To quote the Dhammapada once more, it is said in verse no. 80 that self-conquest is the role of the wise: *attānaṃ damayanti paṇḍitā*. This is the conquest supreme: the conquest without conflict, wherein all conflicts are resolved. This is truly established in our respect for all life without discrimination, of man and bird and beast.

Hence we return to our theme with which we began **To Love and Be Loved** as Buddhism's message for the new millennium.

May all beings be well and happy. May there be peace on earth and goodwill among men.

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